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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 ATHENS 001497

SIPDIS
FROM THE AMBASSADOR TO ADM STAVRIDIS
AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [NATO](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: YOUR VISIT TO ATHENS

CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (C),
(D)

¶1. (C) Admiral Stavridis: Welcome to Greece. Your visit comes at a time of political fervor and uncertainty, with early national elections called by an embattled Prime Minister on October 4 in which he and his party are widely expected to lose to the opposition center-left PASOK party. Beyond politics, Greeks have a deep respect and affection for American culture and Americans in general dating to the Marshall Plan and earlier. U.S.-Greek military-to-military cooperation is good, particularly at the U.S. Navy base at Souda Bay on Crete, which plays a key role in supporting U.S. military operations in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Greece is also among the largest purchasers of U.S. military equipment. At the same time, Greece's participation in NATO is politically sensitive with weak public support for NATO operations.

¶2. (C) Though I recognize you are coming in your capacity as SACEUR, your trip, in bolstering Greece's commitment to NATO, can in turn foster a number of American policy goals both in Greece and the region. I recommend you press the Greeks to:

- live up to the commitment they made to President Obama to enhance their Afghanistan contributions;
- continue to support Turkey's EU orientation;
- seek to foster goodwill in the Aegean and reciprocate any Turkish gestures, despite passionately held views and frustrations; and
- work vigorously to find a solution to the Macedonia name issue that would allow Macedonia to join NATO and strengthen stability in Greece's neighborhood.

Political Overview

13. (C) The last twelve months have been marked by a succession of crises for the government of Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis, who managed to hold onto his one-seat majority in Parliament through a series of intra-party scandals, the global financial crisis, widespread rioting following the police shooting of a teenager, resurged domestic terrorism, huge numbers of illegal migrants entering Greece, an increase in Turkish military overflights of Greek islands, and most recently the serious forest fires on the outskirts of Athens. However, on September 2, a somber Karamanlis, in the face of constant attack by the opposition and plummeting approval ratings, called for new elections, which will occur October 4. It is quite possible that many of your interlocutors during this trip will be out of government less than a week after you leave Greece. All polling expects the current opposition PASOK party to carry the day, led by longtime politician and head of the Socialist International, George Papandreou. Though his party has in the past been more anti-American in its rhetoric than Karamanlis' New Democracy party, both leaders are mainstream in their approach to bilateral relations. Papandreou has an American mother, has lived and studied in the U.S., and having been Foreign Minister under a previous PASOK administration, developed a good reputation at NATO and in the international community as a thoughtful and constructive interlocutor.

ATHENS 00001497 002 OF 005

ISAF

14. (C) At every opportunity, and at every level, we encourage the Greeks to contribute more to efforts in Afghanistan. The caveat limiting Greek soldiers to Kabul was lifted in April 2009 but the Greek engineer battalion has not yet moved to Herat because the Greeks are seeking to upgrade their force protection assets prior to deploying out of Kabul (they seek 32 MRAP-type vehicles and 52 anti-IED ECM devices). The Greeks are seeking assistance in meeting these force protection requirements and will likely raise this issue with you. No official requests have been made via the Country Team or ODC. Greece has pledged to stand up a 17-person OMLT in Jan/Feb 2010 and to take control of the Kabul airport in April 2010. These new missions will result in the near doubling of the Greek contingent from its present size of approximately 150 personnel to nearly 300. Given the non-deployable nature of much Greek military hardware, and the focus of much of it across the Evro River and Aegean toward Turkey, we believe that a strong pitch to the Greeks to provide materiel and financial assistance to NATO's Training Mission in Afghanistan could bear fruit. Greek participation in ISAF remains unpopular with the Greek population at large, and any future casualties that can be attributed to inadequate force protection measures could result in extreme pressure on the Government to remove its forces from ISAF.

TURKEY: EU ACCESSION AND AEGEAN ISSUES

15. (C) Against the sway of public opinion, Prime Minister Karamanlis and Foreign Minister Bakoyannis have been personally committed to supporting Turkey's EU accession, something they see as the right thing for Greece, for Turkey, and for the EU. In today's superheated political environment they are finding it increasingly difficult to manage this line. They have stressed to

us in particular how Turkey's overflights of sovereign Greek islands in the Aegean and its unwillingness to fully implement a 2001 bilateral protocol on the re-admission of third-country illegal migrants has made it harder for the Greeks to continue their visible support for Turkey's EU accession. This dynamic will not change with a new government. Although the potential new-PM Papandreou is proud of his record of cooperation with Turkey during his tenure as Foreign Minister (1999-2004), in recent interviews he has warned that Turkey's EU aspirations could be "up in the air" during its December 2009 EU evaluation should it continue its present course of actions, particularly the provocative overflights of Greek islands in the Aegean.

16. (C) Greece and Turkey still differ on a host of Aegean issues, including air/seaspace demarcation, economic zones, demilitarization issues, and flight safety requirements. Greece often complains of Turkish air incursions in the Aegean, both inside the Greeks' claimed 10 nautical mile airspace boundary (which the U.S. does not recognize, because of the disparity with their six nautical mile territorial sea claim), as well as within the internationally recognized six nautical mile limits. To the chagrin of Turkey, Greece "tags" as hostile Turkish military flights in the Aegean, and routinely intercepts Turkish aircraft. Armed, low-level Turkish overflights of the inhabited Greek islands

ATHENS 00001497 003 OF 005

of Agathonisi and Farmakonisi have dramatically increased in 2009 compared to prior years, though the Turks seem to have recently suspended these flights. Both countries have in the past attempted to use NATO exercises to press claims or to make points. Regardless, both countries consistently bring up operational or tactical arguments to further their claims. We recommend taking an overall strategic approach that emphasizes mutual respect, confidence building measures, and safety of flight with both countries, while encouraging the Greeks to respond positively to the cessation of Turkish overflights over the inhabited Islands. Suggesting that they should stop labeling Turkish flights as hostile would be a good step, consistent with what NATO has been encouraging in the past.

17. (C) We believe that your Greek interlocutors understand that current Aegean tensions are counterproductive, expensive, and potentially damaging to the greater interests of both Greece and Turkey, as well as NATO. Yet on this and other issues where they believe national sovereignty is at stake, you will find them to be obstinate interlocutors. They believe that even one intentional Turkish overflight is one too many, and refuse to countenance "Codes of Conduct" if they in any way add legitimacy to claims that call into question Greek sovereignty. They believe that Aegean boundaries are already clearly demarcated in international treaties agreed after World War I and World War II. Nevertheless, we continuously urge Greece not to be the country slowing up any positive developments in the Aegean, to show goodwill, to be prepared to act on any goodwill shown by Turkey, and not to use NATO exercises to make political points.

MACEDONIA AND THE BALKANS

18. (C) On Macedonia, we believe that you should encourage the Greeks to work vigorously and with goodwill towards Skopje to find a solution. You should highlight the damage this name dispute does to NATO and Euro-Atlantic security. However, any solution lies at the Prime Ministerial level, and as such, you should not let the Greeks dominate limited meeting time with this issue. Greeks

consider the unmodified use of "Macedonia" a usurpation of their heritage and warn that it could encourage irredentism towards Greece's northern province of the same name. Provocative, nationalistic action by Skopje such as renaming the international airport "Alexander the Great" have not helped soften negotiating positions. We have repeatedly urged both sides to lower the rhetoric and engage in negotiations led by Matthew Nimetz under the auspices of the United Nations.

¶9. (C) The Greeks have consistently told us they are willing to compromise on the Macedonia name issue as long as the formula is consistent with the bipartisan agreement in Greece about how far they can go. Greek red lines include an insistence on "erga omnes" use in international fora of a new name with a geographic modifier. The GoG may be willing to overlook continued use by Skopje of the word "Macedonian" to describe the identity of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, but they won't countenance any effort to codify this in international usage. This controversy remains emotional and politically salient for many Greeks; given the precarious political balance in Greece, the government is not in a position to offer any further significant concessions to Skopje, and is unlikely to be able to go much farther in the near future.

ATHENS 00001497 004 OF 005

¶10. (SBU) In other parts of the Balkans, despite their unhappiness with Kosovo's independence, FM Bakoyannis has said Greece "will not be the first, but neither will it be the last" state to recognize Kosovo. Greece maintains substantial military forces in NATO's Kosovo force and is providing personnel and support to the EU's "Rule of Law Mission" in Kosovo. We welcome Greece's ongoing efforts to urge Serbia to take a forward-looking approach to its future in the European and Euro-Atlantic community. In Bosnia, Greece participated in NATO's SFOR operation until its successful conclusion in December 2005. Greece maintains approximately 45 soldiers in the EU's follow-on "Althea" security and stability mission.

OTHER ISSUES

¶11. (C) OTHER MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS: Greek contributions to other important initiatives are substantial and should not be overlooked. The U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force rely heavily on Naval Support Activity Souda Bay in Crete as a support hub for sea and air operations in the Eastern Mediterranean, Afghanistan, and Iraq. (Comment: Although it is fine to thank them privately during meetings, Greek public sentiment is generally anti-NATO, and anti-American military, so the help Greece gives us at Souda Bay and with frequent transshipments of ammunition are subjects they would like to keep private avoiding any public acknowledgments.) Greece allows over 24,000 over-flights of U.S. military aircraft a year and also participates in NATO's Operation Active Endeavour, the EU's counter-piracy mission off of Somalia Operation Atalanta, and the UN's Lebanon mission, UNIFIL.

¶12. (C) U.S. DEFENSE PROCUREMENT: Greece is a large purchaser of U.S. defense goods and stands poised to purchase more. We have over \$8 billion in FMS cases and there is potential for more than \$6 billion coming up for international competition over the next two years. As Greece tends to include political as well as technical and market-based evaluations in its decision making, your meeting will also provide an opportunity to show the value we place in our strategic relationship.

¶13. (C) IMMIGRATION: Greece has become an entry point of choice for illegal immigrants into the European Union. The number of illegals detained by Greek authorities has increased dramatically over the last two years, reaching 140,000 last year (in a country with a population of only about 11 million). The presence of these migrants - many of whom originated in conflict zones in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East and entered Greece via Turkey - has become a major political issue. It also roils Greek-Turkish relations on occasion, with the Greeks leveling accusations that Turkey does not do enough to stop the outflow to Greece, and indeed, aids and abets the illegal immigrants. Greece is making a strong push for the European Union to take this issue on and to negotiate repatriation agreements with source countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¶14. (S) TERRORISM: Greece has also been burdened with a resurgence of domestic terrorism. Following several years of a lull with the wrap-up of the November 17 group, attacks are again

ATHENS 00001497 005 OF 005

on the rise. The U.S. Embassy suffered an RPG attack in January of 2007, and more recently we have seen the first detonation of a car bomb at the Athens Stock Exchange on September 2, and the killing of a police officer in June. The U.S. has been offering technical assistance and sharing intelligence through DHS, FBI, and other agencies, but the Greeks are woefully unprepared for any significant increase in terrorist activity. We are also concerned that the rise of Greece as a migration path from troubled spots to Western Europe and vice-versa opens the door to international extremists making a foothold here or using Greece as a "safe house" for planning nefarious activities.

¶15. (SBU) FIRES: Your offer, in your EUCOM hat, to assist the Greek government in combating the fires that ravaged villages and natural areas just north of Athens in August was greatly appreciated. Though our offer ultimately was not used, our interlocutors thanked us profusely, and I believe this quick U.S. action did much to foster goodwill.

¶16. (U) Thank you for coming to Greece so early in your tenure. We look forward to seeing you. Safe travels. Dan Speckhard